

Watchung Environmental Commission Minutes

August 28, 2017

Present: Karen Pennett, Sindy Epstein, Rachael Funcheon, Don Pote, Jim Stout, Andy Stout, and Joan Tak.

Absent: George Sopko

Call to Order the meeting was called to order at 7:37 p.m. The April and May minutes were approved.

Planning Board

Reported by Karen Pennett

*Fisher Lane subdivision was approved with a side yard variance. This variance is required to provide a turnaround to allow enough area for emergency vehicles to access the properties on Fisher Lane. This emergency vehicle access will improve the area. Fisher Lane is a private road off of Century

*Sears reviewed site plans for both Sears Retail and Automotive:

**Sears Retail: Final plans for the 2 larger buildings have been approved. The final plans for the pads are pending. After retailers for pads determined, plans for pads will be reviewed by planning board

**Sears Automotive: Sears Automotive to be replaced with a Multiplex Theatre. Plans for the theatre still being discussed. Traffic and safety issues a concern especially with the Watchung Square Mall right next to the proposed theatre and new complex across street where Sear's Retail currently located.

*Weldon Tree Replacement Weldon submitted their tree replacement plan for the expansion of the quarry. Trees to be planted to provide landscaping buffer with the quarry expansion. Weldon did an exceptional tree replacement plan, there were no issues.

Tree Report

Reported by Sindy Epstein

This report encompasses June, July and August

35 Winter Lane, 5/23/2017 30 dead trees mostly elms of various sizes Remove 30

25 Edgewood Lane, 5/23/2017, vacant house, heavily over grown, 3 dead, 9 live close to house. Remove 12 trees

58, Wildwood Terrace, 6/27/2017, 7 pine trees to be removed, replace 7 @4", 20 trees @2 ½" (removed before) All trees replacements to be completed by Oct 2017

99 Tuttle Road. 7/13/2017, Tear down on existing lot, new construction is retaining one original wall. Remove 6 trees, 2 outside the house box. Replace two @ 4"

36 Ellisen Road, The owner was issued a permit to remove 5 live trees and 1 dead tree in 2016. The owner does not want to plant the four, 4 inches trees that were required as replacement trees. The owner feels that the lot is too full of trees and has had Sage Landscape contractors issue a letter to this issue. The owner wants to fund the tree bank \$800 for the replacement trees. This is in conflict with our permit rules. The commission voted that to allow funding of the tree bank with \$800 instead of planting the required trees.

6 Fox Chase Drive 8/3/2017 owner is building a three car garage; Remove 11 Trees, all trees in building foot print.

63 East Drive, 8/3/2017 new home owner wants to cut 8 trees for more light and safety 7 dead or diseased, 1 live. Replace 1 @ 4"

58 Robin Glen 8/16/2017 7 dead trees, no replacement

67 Old Somerset, house addition and patio, Remove 14 trees: 6 outside of the house box. Replace 6; 3 @ 2 1/2", 3 @ 4"

*A letter was sent to Mayor Pote about the emerald ash borer in response to Mr. Ricciardi's letter.

*The Environmental Commission voted 6 to 1 to increase the price of trees into the tree bank from \$200 each to \$350

*Sondy attended a tree identification class at Duke Farms on 7/22/2017 on 7/28/2017

Sondy attended the free NRCS (National Resources Conservation Service) work shop in Frenchtown. The number one concern with the attendees at the work shop was the over population of deer.

Bottle Caps

Reported by Rachel Funcheon

*The bottle cap program at the library is continuing to go very well. The bin fills up every week or two, and the Whole Foods in Madison is happy to receive the caps and send them out for recycling.

*Pilgrim Pipeline Reported by Rachel Funcheon There is no news on the Pilgrim Pipeline. There has been no activity from them in over a year and some in the coalition against the pipeline feel the project may not go forward.

New Business

*Rachel shared a program that she saw in Maine regarding the non use of garden chemicals. Basically it is a voluntary pledge whereby the residents and businesses can sign, saying that they will not use harmful chemicals on their lawns and vegetation. A map of the town is posted, and each property that has taken the pledge is colored in green. It's called "Put your lawn on the map".

*Joan and Don have tested the use of a non-toxic, environmentally friendly herbicide formula consisting of 20% vinegar, salt and dish detergent for weed and grass control. Although not quite as effective as some commercial (but toxic) formulas, it did the job. After additional trials using varied concentrations and calculating cost, we should be in a position to publish our results.

*Don relayed a complaint from a resident requesting that some simplification and/or clarification is necessary in our Tree Removal Permit Application. Specifically to have only a single page filled out for one or a small number of dead or dying trees. After some discussion it was concluded that the information required on both (two) pages of the application is required and that no changes are necessary at this time.

***Deer Wildlife**

Letter Reported by Karen

The Watchung Wildlife Management Advisory Committee sent an email requesting the Environmental Commission prepare a report on the "state of the forest" as it exists in Watchung. The Environmental Commission discussed many of the issues pertaining to the "state of the forest" including: Over development, Pesticides being used, insects like the Ash Bore coming into the area, drought conditions, deer eating the vegetation, etc. The members of the committee were split on the issues. The committee agreed that we are not experts in the field and a Professional should be contacted to provide a report and recommendations on how to improve and maintain the health of the Watchung Wooded areas. Don requested that, prior to sending EC's response to the Wildlife Committee's request of 8/11/17, it be routed for comment by all EC members. Karen agreed. Additionally, the commission continues to discuss the Watchung deer population. The number of deer has decreased over the past ten years as a result of the deer cull yet as per the recent aerial survey remains at a level higher than recommended for the size of the town. The commission remains divided regarding the cull. Discussion revolved around maintaining the cull while keeping an eye on the population. Suggestions were to set guidelines as to how often the aerial survey should be done, adjusting the timeframe that the cull takes place or alternate years for the cull.

Review of assignments for the next meeting to be held on September 25, 2017

Karen to submit April and May's minutes to Maryanne

Karen to prepare 2018 Calendar

Adjournment The meeting was adjourned at 9:55p.m.

Minutes submitted by Joan Tak